THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE INFLUENCE OF STRUCTURALISM ON PETER HANDKE'S WORK

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC LANGUAGES

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1976

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled ..THE.INFLUENCE.OF.....
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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER..OF..ARTS.....

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Date March 30, 1976

à Roland . . .

parce qu'il a bien

souffert avec moi!

ABSTRACT

Peter Handke, since his debut in 1966, has become more or less a "household word" in Germany and is not doing too badly in translation either. His language-oriented *études* can be read in no less than ten foreign languages.

Because of the great amount of material he publishes and the tremendous amount of publicity he receives for it, he has become somewhat of a mystery, leaving critics and public alike wondering if he is a genius or a charlatan.

He has, however, given certain clues to his readers regarding his literary theories and his steady production is justified by certain literary principles. Handke has admitted that one influence on his work is Structuralism. The amount of discourse about the subject Structuralism far supercedes even that about Handke.

This thesis attempts to point out the Structuralist influence on Handke's work, after having considered those basic aspects of Structuralism which are relevant to modern thinking. A representative selection of Handke's work has been chosen for this purpose: selected theatrical works, *Publikumsbeschimpfung*, *Kaspar*, and *Der Ritt über den Bodensee*; examples from his collection of "poetry", *Die Innenwelt der Aussenwelt der Innenwelt*;

and finally, his novel Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Dr. H. Pausch for his assistance, and more than that--his patience.

I am also grateful to the Department of Germanic Languages for financial support and to Mrs. L. Lederer for moral support.

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO PETER HANDKE

When Peter Handke took the members of the "Gruppe 47" by surprise with his unabashed attack on their literary work at their annual meeting held in Princeton in April, 1966, they were taken aback more by his impudent appearance (no tie!), than by what he had to say. In fact, the initial reviews about this "Handkestreich"[1] were more concerned with his image than with his literary observations. For example, in his coverage of the meeting in the Spiegel, Erich Kuby concentrates on Handke's image:

> Aber mit dem Nachwuchs haben die Väter (Richter und Grass) Schwierigkeiten. 1966 scheinen sie nur ein Kind zur Welt gebracht zu haben, einen Jungen, der aber ein Mädchen ist. Er heisst Peter Handke. . . .
>
> Dieser Mädchenjunge Peter mit seinen zierlich über die Ohren gekämmten Haaren, mit seinem blauen Schirmmützchen, fast ist man versucht zu sagen Schirmmätzchen, seinen engen Höschen, seinem sanften Osterei-Gesicht. . . .[2]

Kuby's "tongue-in-cheek" comments were not unique. Richard Lettau, in the "Gruppe 47" Handbuch made the remark: "Seine Aufmachung ist Reklame. Sein 'Starlet'

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[1] Horst-Dieter Ebert, "Unerschrocken naiv," Der Spiegel, May 25 (1970), p. 175.

[2] Erich Kuby, "Ach ja, da liest einer," Der Spiegel, May 2 (1966), pp. 162-164.

Benimm eine einzige Herausforderung."[3] And Peter Hamm comes right to the point in his evaluation of Handke's talent when he comments: "Nicht der Autor Handke ist 'in', sondern sein Image. . . ."[4]

While Handke's controversial "image" was collecting columns of space in various literary reviews, three thousand copies of his first novel, Die Hornissen, were collecting dust on the shelves of various bookstores. Yet it was only a few months later, with the production of his first play Publikumsbeschimpfung, that he succeeded in securing the attention of the public whose curiosity he had aroused with "show" at Princeton.

But what exactly did Peter Handke say that caused so much attention to be focused on him at Princeton? Let us first examine the general tone of the gathering as reported by Erich Kuby, the Spiegel reporter who accompanied the group to Princeton in 1966.

His report appeared in the May 2nd issue of the magazine. One can sum up the general tone of the meeting with one word: dull. "Es wird die bravste, anstandigste, behutsamste, feinste, bedeutungsloseste Tagung seit langem, oder seit immer,"[5] writes Kuby, and reports "Auch bei

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[3] Richard Lettau, ed., Die Gruppe 47. Ein Handbuch (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967), p. 403.

[4] Peter Hamm, "Der neuste Fall von Deutscher Innerlichkeit: Peter Handke," in Michael Scharang, ed., Über Peter Handke (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 304.

[5] Kuby, "Ach ja, da liest einer," p. 160.

der Kritik funkelt nichts."[6] Consequently Handke enjoyed a very nice position when he took the podium: his beanie was already more interesting than anything that had taken place in the previous three days! " . . . irgend etwas muss endlich geschehen," writes Kuby, "sonst ist diese Tagung im Eimer . . . und dieser Handke . . . er ist ein Geschenk des Himmels."[7] Interestingly enough, the "Geschenk des Himmels," then a literary unknown and only 23 years of age, received, of 14 columns of type covering a meeting of 120 authors, including the German literary "Prominenz", with names such as Günther Grass, Uwe Johnson, Peter Weiss, to name only a few, two columns of valuable Spiegel space and a picture!

Let us consider, then, the outburst which brought some life into Hans Werner Richter's floundering meeting, lifted Peter Handke out of the ranks of the unknown and provided for him all the glamour and raised eyebrows associated with being a "controversial figure":

> . . . er verletzt schliesslich entschlossen Gesetz Nummer 5, indem er plötzlich zu einem fundamentalen Angriff auf alles ansetzt, was er seit Tagen gehört hat. Er erklärt es für Beschreibungsliteratur, für läppische Beschreibungsliteratur, für Bilderbuchduden, und die Gestik dieser Sprache für völlig öd. Er sagt, das

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[6] Kuby, "Ach ja, da liest einer," p. 160.

[7] ibid., p. 162.

> Instrumentarium der Kritiker reiche gerade noch in seiner Läppischkeit für diese läppische Art von Literatur aus, aber zu allem, was darüber läge, fehlten ihnen, den Herren Kritikern, Begriffe und Verstehen.
>
> . . . 50 von 50 Schriftstellern gut beschriebene Dachrinnen sind keine Literatur, sondern Flucht aus der Wirklichkeit, Unwissenheit, Lebensfremde, Lebensangst, Verkrochenheit, Schwachsinn und Langeweile, unerträgliche Langeweile.[8]

Obviously, after that, Handke left himself wide open to the challenge of verifying these statements by producing a sample of something better than the current "läppische Art von Literatur".

Handke has not stopped responding to this challenge since then. Although his first works after the Princeton affair focused on the theater, Handke's writings are not limited to the theater; they consist of plays, essays, poetry, radio plays, short stories, a television script and several novels. It follows that when an author, particularly a young author who has just stepped out of the ranks of the unknown, suddenly bombards the literary scene with a seemingly endless stream of varied and rather controversial work, he is bound to be counterattacked and is likely to find himself under the endless fire of the critics, especially after having denounced their methods as trifling.

By October of 1969, the quarterly Text und Kritik devoted its issue 24 to Handke. Such exposure for a young

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[8] Kuby, "Ach ja, da liest einer," pp. 162-164.

author seems very impressive, however a reading of the 11 articles submitted to the publication reveals only one (Hans Mayer) which gives Handke any support at all. Mayer's article, "Kaspar, der Fremde und der Zufall,"[9] rates Handke as progressive. His issue is that some of the points which Handke makes in his play Kaspar about coincidence and alienation bear some resemblance to those of Camus in L'Étranger, which is a valid observation since Handke is very familiar with French literature.[10] However, Mayer is the only one in the Text und Kritik collection who ventures to say that there is any point to Handke's work at all. The opinions of the other contributors are already evident in their titles: "Zwischen Virtuosität und Vakuum" (Uwe Schultz); "Sterile Exerzitien" (Jörg Drews); "Der Fall Handke oder die Monotonie in der Literatur" (Peter Schumann); to name only a few. Most interesting about this collection is the "Auswahlbibliographie zu Peter Handke", contributed by Harald Müller and containing no less than 1500 titles.

By 1970, the Free University of Berlin had instituted

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[9] Hans Mayer, "Kaspar, der Fremde und der Zufall," Text und Kritik, 24 (1969), pp. 30-42.

[10] See Peter Handke's essay, "Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms," in Handke, Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 19-28, in which he discusses his expectations of literature and mentions several figures who have had an influence on him.

a "Handke-Seminar," an undertaking of the "Rote Zelle Germanistik" (Rotzeg), the purpose of which they proclaimed to be to enlighten unsuspecting "Handke-Schwärmer" in the first semester.[11]

In 1972, Michael Scharang had enough material collected to add a 400-page book, Über Peter Handke,[12] to Suhrkamp's "Über . . ." series. This collection of articles and newspaper reviews again features Müller's bibliography, expanded to include at least as many titles again as had appeared in 1969, and including the translations of his work in no less than 10 languages. Again, closer scrutiny of this impressive looking volume will reveal that Handke's critics were less than kind to him. Of course, up to this point, Handke had been more than ambitious about providing the critics with material--his fourth novel had just rolled off the presses with an impressive first printing of 40,000 copies![13] Obviously such enormous production receiving so much attention is bound to make one suspicious of the content. As Ernst Wendt suggested, for the price of a Handke book or a ticket to a Handke play, it is only normal to suspect

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[11] Horst-Dieter Ebert, op. cit., p. 174.

[12] Michael Scharang, ed., Über Peter Handke (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973).

[13] Peter Handke, Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972).

that one is being sold a fashionable image.[14] Such a controversial figure is, of course, intriguing, and therefore I should like to examine the content of his work, assuming that there is more to be found in his books than a high market value for the Suhrkamp Publishing Company.

However, it is not the objective of this study to consider in depth the critics' opinions of Handke's work, nor to determine whether or not he has been correctly judged or misjudged; but rather to examine his work according to his objectives as stated by himself, paying particular attention to certain aspects of French Structuralism, an influence upon his work which he himself has admitted, but has nevertheless remained largely disregarded by his critics. In Handke's own words:

> Ich bin als einziger deutscher Schreiber vom französischen Strukturalismus beeinflusst worden.[15]

In order to examine Handke's work in the context of this enlightening statement, it is first necessary to review briefly the concept of Structuralism.

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[14] Ernst Wendt, "Handke 1966-71: Ein Schriftsteller, die Zeit und die Sprache," in Scharang, op. cit., p. 340.

[15] Horst-Dieter Ebert, op. cit., p. 187.

CHAPTER I

STRUCTURALISM AND LITERARY ANALYSIS

Structuralism, initially a linguistic method of analyzing language, found its beginnings in several corners of the world simultaneously: in Moscow with Roman Jakobson, who established a linguistic school there as early as 1915 and later moved to Prague and was associated with the Prague School of Linguistics; in Copenhagen with Hjelmslev,[1] in America with Bloomfield,[2] and in Switzerland with Saussure.[3] Because of the second World War and the resulting inability to communicate, these various schools developed in divergent directions; however attempts at a synthesis were eventually undertaken. For example, Roman Jakobson worked out a synthesis of the Prague and American views,[4] and was followed by

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[1] Louis Hjelmslev, Omkring sprogteoriens grundlaeggelse (Copenhagen, 1943), trans., F. Whitfield, Prolegomena to a Theory of Language (Baltimore, 1953).

[2] L. Bloomfield, Language (New York, 1933).

[3] Ferdinand de Saussure, Cours de Linguistique Générale, Publié par Charles Bally et Albert Sechehaye avec la collaboration d'Albert Riedlinger; édition critique preparée par Tullio de Mauro (Paris: Payot, 1972). This work will hereafter be referred to by the shortened title, Cours.

[4] R. Jakobson et. al., Preliminaries to Speech Analysis, the Distinctive Features and their Correlates (Cambridge, 1952).

Sydney Lamb,[5] whose work is heavily influenced by Hjelmslev's theories.[6]

The fundamental conjectures of structural linguistics were based upon two concepts: system and structure. Language is a system of systems and one of these systems is a phonetic one. Phonetic units achieve value only when functioning together within the phonetic system. The structure of the system lies in these relationships between phonemes and in their linguistic order, not in the individual phonemes. The phonemes themselves are recognised as being the result of an evolutionary, historic process (diachronic). They attain significance, however, only by means of a synchronic phenomenon: the interrelationships. For example, a single phonetic unit, "p", is of no consequence to an observer, unless it is combined with other phonetic units, "p i n", to form a "word", which is in turn of no great significance until it is combined with other "words".

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[5] S. Lamb, "Kinship terminology and linguistic structure," American Anthropologist, 67 (1965), pp. 37-64.

[6] For a brief but very informative overview of the theories of the above-mentioned various schools of structural linguistics, see S.K. Šaumjan, Principles of Structural Linguistics (Paris: Mouton, 1971); as well as Elizabeth Barber's annotated "Linguistics" bibliography in Jacques Ehrmann, Structuralism (New York: Anchor Books, 1970). pp. 239-244.

Structuralism, then, was conceived as a method of analysis dealing with the discovery of the underlying interrelating structures of a seemingly organised complex, i.e., language. Language had never before been examined from such a point of view--from the assumption that it had a structure. Since then, the structuralist method of analysis of a structure in order to discover the underlying principles of that structure has diverged widely from the field of linguistics and has been applied to fields as diverse as anthropology,[7] psychology,[8] mathematics and engineering,[9] and of course, literary criticism.[10]

It is from Ferdinand de Saussure's innovative thoughts about studying language as such that we have the fundamental Structuralist modes of thought. In

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[7] Claude Lévi-Strauss, Anthropologie Structurale (Paris, 1958).

[8] Jacques Lacan, Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis, trans. with notes and commentary by Anthony Wilden, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968).

[9] Charles Tompkins and Edwin Beckenbach, eds., Concepts of Communication: Interpersonal, Intrapersonal and Mathematical, University of California Engineering and Physical Sciences Extension Series, (New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1971).

[10] Roland Barthes, Essaies Critiques (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964).

his Cours de Linguistique Générale,[11] he introduced those aspects of Structuralism which still remain basic to current Structuralist discussions. Saussure was unique; his pioneering work is said to have caused a "revolution in the study of language"[12] because he considered language as a thing in itself. He referred to language as an object (a "Gegenstand") and considered it important enough to be an object of scientific investigation. He then proceeded to give his "object" language certain characteristics.

First of all, he considered language as a social institution; a system of signs among other systems of signs, but as the most important of all other semiological systems. This systemic character which he assigned to language led to the concept that language is a principle of classification: we order our thoughts by means of our language and thereby it is possible to bring natural order into an otherwise chaotic situation, for example, the infinite number of possible linguistic utterances.

Further, Saussure pointed out the synchronic as opposed to the diachronic characteristic of language;

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[11] Saussure, Cours, ed. cit.

[12] Howard Gardner, The Quest for Mind. Piaget, Lévi-Strauss and the Structuralist Movement (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), pp. 44-45.

not to the total exclusion of the diachronic nature of language, however he shifted the emphasis onto the synchronic properties. This concept, that the elements of language cannot exist in isolation, but rather are constantly in a state of mutual interdependence, attains further significance when language is viewed as a social system among other social systems.

Within the system of language as such, Saussure made some further unique and important differentiations. For example, using a linguistic utterance as a reference point, he pointed to the possible discrepancies between intended expression and achieved expression. First, he refers to the original verbal sign as being arbitrary because the choice is the result of a certain social situation. From this he develops the concepts of "signifiant" (the signifier--das Bedeutende), and "signifié" (the signified--das Bedeutete). The "signifiant" is the intended expression, that is, a linguistic utterance. It follows then, that the "signifié" is the achieved expression, and its value as an "achieved expression", that is, its communicative value, is subject to the linguistic as well as the social value system of its recipient.

Finally, because Structuralism concerns itself with language and the phenomenon of communication, one should be aware of exactly what resources one has to draw upon,

in other words, one should have a definite notion of what language is, as far as this is possible. For this purpose, Saussure has defined the components of communicative language and has differentiated between "langage", "langue", and "parole". It remains of utmost importance to modern Structuralist thought to make the distinction between language as the ability to make linguistic utterances (faculté de langage--Sprachfähigkeit), the language that is spoken in a specific social environment (langue--Sprache) and the editing of the "langue" which an individual undertakes in order to achieve selfexpression, (parole--Sprechen).[13] It is around these Saussurian terms: "langue", "parole", "signifiant", "signifié", and the concept of language being subject to synchronic interrelationships, that Structuralist discussions have revolved ever since Structuralism gained a significant foothold in European and American intellectual circles in the early 1950s.

Since then, however, the applications of these concepts have again developed in very divergent directions. What was initially a new theory about the structure of language (Saussure) was then adopted in principle as a formal method of analyzing that structure. This resulted in structural linguistics, which sought to apply the Saussurian principles methodologically and investigate

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[13] Saussure, Cours, pp. 37 ff.

the linguistic structures or "building blocks" of a language in order to discover those distinctive features which in combination could account for more complex linguistic entities. This method of analysis, based on the assumption that the structure being examined does in fact have an underlying system, then developed into a philosophical trend applied to numerous social phenomena with language remaining the paradigm case.

In the social sciences one assumed that, just as tangible, scientific phenomena have a structure which is able to be discussed in clear, formal language, so do social phenomena possess a structure which is definable. The classic example of this last trend is Claude Lévi-Strauss with his structural anthropology,[14] in which he sought to determine the underlying units of cultures which could account for cultural phenomena such as marriage, kinship or other social rituals.

Today there is a common consensus that Structuralism still remins one of those difficult to define and even undefinable "--isms", although there seems to be basic agreement that it deals with the analysis of communicative systems based on language, such as literature. In October of 1966, an international Symposium was held at the Johns Hopkins University entitled "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" which, attended by

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[14] Lévi-Strauss, Anthropologie Structurale, ed. cit.

such distinguished scholars as Lucien Goldmann, Roland Barthes and Tzvetan Todorov, inaugurated a two-year program of seminars and colloquia, with the intention of exploring Structuralist thought in the humanistic and social sciences. In the preface to the collection of transcripts of the symposium one reads:

> . . . the organizers were not seeking to promote a manifesto nor even to arrive at a fixed and unambiguous definition of structuralism itself . . . there seemed already to be too many manifestos, while satisfactory definitions of such polymorphic activities, or cultural events are generally only achieved after the principals are safely dead.[15]

In the same modest tone and in the same year, Jacques Ehrmann, introducing a special issue of Yale French Studies dedicated to Structuralism, wrote:

> What is Structuralism? . . . No simple or single definition applies to it except in very general terms.
> Whatever the efficacity of the structural method--or better, of structural methods--in giving form to languages and human relations (or in finding their form), they will doubtless always elude man's grasp.[16]

In fact, books and articles which set out to deal with

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[15] Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds., The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man. The Structuralist Controversy (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970). p. ix.

[16] Jacques Ehrmann, Structuralism (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 3.

Structuralism almost invariably begin by approaching a definition of Structuralism with extreme caution, and rarely venture to go beyond the "very general terms". For example, Jean Piaget begins his book entitled Structuralism with the cautious heading "Definitions"; and then states:

> Structuralism is often said to be hard to define because it has taken too many different forms for a common denominator to be in evidence: the structures invoked by the several "structuralists" have acquired increasingly diverse significations.[17]

Roland Barthes himself, the most respected name among French Structuralists, in 1963 asked the question: "What is Structuralism?" and proceeded to say that those names associated with Structuralism by no means feel unified by a common doctrine:

> Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme? Ce n'est pas une école ni même un mouvement (du moins pas encore), car la plupart des auteurs que l'on rattache ordinairement à ce mot ne se sentent nullement liés entre eux par une solidarité de doctrine ou de combat.[18]

And in 1974, in Adam Schaff's examination of Structuralism and Marxism, one still reads:

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[17] Jean Piaget, Structuralism (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 3.

[18] Barthes, Essaies Critiques, op. cit., p. 213.

> Was ist Strukturalismus? Diese Frage kann man verschiedenartig verstehen, aber vor allem wird sich einem aufdrängen, sie als Ruf nach einer Definition aufzufassen. Und hier stellen sich sofort die ersten Schwierigkeiten ein.[19]

Schaff goes on to say that Structuralism, or rather Structuralist methodology, can be and has been applied to such a variety of disciplines, from linguistics to anthropology, that it consequently becomes difficult to deduce a common denominator from all the theories which have arisen.

One can conclude, however, in order to come to some kind of working definition, that Structuralist thought may be applied to any system of signs; in fact, to any semiotic system whose function is communication. Considering Saussure's innovative methods of studying language, it becomes evident that through structural analysis the actual communicability of a set of signs can be verified. One such set of signs is literature. To evaluate a literary œuvre is to interpret its "signifiants" in terms of a certain acquired value system. For a critic to form a negative opinion of a work could imply only that the author has used a type of "parole" (self-expression) with which the critic is not familiar, or which he has simply not yet considered.

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[19] Adam Schaff, Strukturalismus und Marxismus (Wien: Europa Verlag, 1974), p. 13.

Peter Handke's best defence against the attacks of his critics could have been that his own particular "parole" remains non-communicative to them, that is, their acquired literary value system is different from his. He did not, however, respond to his critics in such direct terms. He preferred to chant his literary credo with a multitude of practical examples. It is one of Peter Handke's objectives to draw attention to the fact that literary language draws upon ordinary language and that the communicability of a literary work depends upon the communicability of the "parole", that is, the underlying structure of the combinations chosen from the resource "langue". The system of which Handke is seeking to discover underlying structures is not restricted to a linguistic system. Handke is rather working with a social system where literature comprises one of its "rituals" or communicative means. Hence one finds in his work the continuous attempt to remain within the framework of modern Structuralist thought, but to demonstrate literally the function of those basic aspects of Structuralism just mentioned within this framework.

Therefore I wish to consider these basic aspects of Structuralism in greater depth, and to demonstrate their omnipresence in the writings of Peter Handke. For this purpose, I have selected some of Handke's most

representative works. To discuss the aspects of Structuralism in all of Handke's work would be beyond the scope of this thesis as well as painfully repetitive.

CHAPTER II

HANDKE'S SYNCHRONIC THEATER

Immediately after the affair at Princeton, Handke wrote an essay entitled "Zur Tagung der Gruppe 47 in USA",[1] in which he defended his position, since he had been accused of breaking "Gesetz Nummer 5", a "Gruppe 47" rule requiring that any criticism voiced at a meeting may only be directed at the text which had just been read, and not at all the texts in terms of a general point of view. In the essay he expounded further upon what he had said there and already then in 1966 the Structuralist influence on Handke's thought is profoundly evident, since his prime literary concern is the language with which literature is made rather than the topics which are made into literature. Handke states in the essay:

> Es wird nämlich verkannt, dass die Literatur mit der Sprache gemacht wird, und nicht mit den Dingen, die mit der Sprache beschrieben werden, . . . und die Kritik misst die Wahrheit der Literatur nicht daran, dass die Worte stimmen, mit denen man die Gegenstände beschreibt, sondern daran, ob die Gegenstände "der Wirklichkeit entsprechen." Man denkt über die Gegenstände

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[1] Peter Handke, "Zur Tagung der Gruppe 47 in Princeton," in Peter Handke, Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 29-34. This collection of essays will hereafter be referred by the shortened title, Elfenbeinturm.

> nach, die man "Wirklichkeit" nennt, aber nicht über die Worte, die doch eigentlich die Wirklichkeit der Literatur sind.
>
> Die Sprache wird nur benützt. Sie wird benützt um zu beschreiben, ohne dass aber in der Sprache selber sich etwas rührt. Die Sprache bleibt tot, ohne Bewegung, dient nur als Namenschild für die Dinge.[2]

It seems that Peter Handke was aware of Saussure, who grappled with exactly the same misconception about the nature of language when he wrote: "Il y a d'abord la conception superficielle du grand public: il ne voit dans la langue qu'une nomenclature, ce qui supprime toute recherche sur sa nature véritable."[3]

Saussure then proceeded to examine the "nature véritable" of language in terms of the aspects or characteristics briefly mentioned in the previous chapter: differentiating between "langue" and "parole", realising the arbitrariness of "signifiants" and "signifiés"; and stressing the synchronic over the diachronic nature of language.

It cannot be overstressed that, in focusing on the synchronic nature of language, Saussure did not wish its diachronic nature to be disregarded or rejected. However, placement of the emphasis on synchrony allowed for greater freedom when examining the

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[2] Handke, "Zur Tagung der Gruppe 47 in USA," op. cit., pp. 29-30

[3] Saussure, Cours, op. cit., p. 34.

other important aspects of language. Saussure's own thoughts on synchrony, expressed in Cours de Linguistique Générale, the collection of his lecture notes compiled after his death, read as follows:

> La linguistique synchronique s'occupera des rapports logiques et psychologiques reliant des termes coexistants et formant système, tels qu'ils sont aperçus par la même conscience collective.[4]

Synchronic linguistics, then, is concerned with the logical and psychological relations which bind together coexisting terms, hence forming a system in the collective mind of speakers, i.e., within a specific social environment.

What are the implications, then, of this Saussurian concept of synchrony to literature and how did Peter Handke illustrate this point with practical examples?

Since Structuralism is above all a method of analysis, we must consider, then, that this concept of synchrony, which places considerable emphasis upon the social relations within the system in which the critic and the author function, exhausts the subjective possibilities of an analysis. Primarily, literature is a system which functions only by means of another system--language--and hence a valid analysis of a literary text requires an analysis of its most fundamental component

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[4] Saussure, Cours, p. 140.

before it focuses upon other aspects. In order to give this most important component of language its rightful focal point, it is necessary to examine a text primarily from the point of view of its linguistic relations, which are, as will be demonstrated later, directly related to existing social relations, i.e., the "conscience collective".

Peter Handke sought to focus on just this aspect of a text by providing practical examples of literary texts which exclude those elements which lead to subjective evaluations (for example, plots and metaphors) and which necessarily require analysis on the basis of their fundamental element--language.

The critic who actually described a method for going about such an analysis was Roland Barthes. Barthes refers to Structuralism as an "activity" (Tätigkeit):

> On dira donc que par rapport a tous ses usagers, le structuralisme est essentiellement une activité, c'est-à-dire, la succession reglée d'un certain nombre d'opérations mentales: on pourrait parler d'activité structuraliste.[5]

This Structuralist activity or "Tätigkeit" consists of the succession of several mental operations, and Barthes proceeds to describe the goal of this activity as the discovery of the rules by which an object functions:

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[5] Roland Barthes, Essaies Critiques, op. cit., p. 214.

> Le but de toute activité structuraliste . . . est de reconstituer un "objet", de façon à manifester dans cette reconstitution les règles de fonctionnement (les "fonctions") de cet objet.[6]

Finally, he indicates by which method the Structuralist "activité" can serve to discover these rules:

> L'activité structuraliste comporte deux opérations typiques: découpage et agencement.[7]

These two operations, (to which I shall henceforth refer by their German translations, "Zerlegung" and "Arrangement"); provide the methodology with which to analyse a given system within a synchronic framework. Saussure was operating within this same framework when he considered linguistics from the point of view of "rapports logiques et psychologiques reliant des termes coexistants."[8]

One should remain well aware that, despite the implication to the contrary, "synchronic" is not synonymous with "static". Were this the case, then one could not refer to "Zerlegung" and "Arrangement" as being within the realm of synchronic analysis, because there is a process involved in disassembling and

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[6] Roland Barthes, Essaies Critiques, p. 214.

[7] ibid., p. 216.

[8] Saussure, Cours, p. 140.

rearranging any given structure. S. K. Šaumjan, in his informative book, The Principles of Structural Linguistics, defines structural linguistics as: "the science of the dynamic aspect of synchrony."[9] This "dynamic aspect of synchrony" is crucial to Structuralist thought, since Structuralism deals with interrelationships.

Peter Handke proceeds to apply aspects of this theory to literature in that he recognises primarily that, above all, literature is made up of language, and that any in-depth literary analysis presupposes an omnipresent consciousness of this fact. When he states in his essay "Zur Tagung der Gruppe 47 in USA" that the essence of literature is language and not those things which are described with the language,[10] he is almost echoing Roland Barthes' words of 1963:

> Die Literatur hat ein besonderes Statut, dass sie aus Sprache gemacht ist, das heisst mit einem Material, das bereits etwas bedeutet, wenn sie sich seiner bemächtigt.[11]

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[9] S. K. Šaumjan, The Principles of Structural Linguistics (Paris: Mouton, 1971), p. 15.

[10] Handke, in Elfenbeinturm, p. 29.

[11] Roland Barthes, "Literatur und Bedeutung" in Barthes, Literatur oder Geschichte (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 108. This collection of essays will hereafter be referred to by the shortened title, Literatur.

Like Saussure, Barthes regards language as an object (Material) and goes one step further in viewing literature as a "parasite" of language.[12]

Peter Handke, in attempting to put this theory into practice, began with the literary form "theater", and made "words" into its main component at the expense of all other distractions, such as props, scenery, lighting and sound effects. Hence his first theatrical events, the Sprechstücke, which were immediately labeled as "anti-theater". He made his point immediately and precisely in the first and most important of these three pieces, Publikumsbeschimpfung. Publikumsbeschimpfung is not a play about anything; it is exactly what it is--a "Sprechstück"--and it explains its dramatic intentions as such:

> . . . Diese Bühne stellt nichts dar. . . . Sie sehen keinen Raum, der einen anderen Raum vortäuscht. Sie erleben hier keine Zeit, die eine andere Zeit bedeutet. Hier auf der Bühne ist die Zeit keine andere als die bei Ihnen. . . . Hier ist keine andere Welt als bei Ihnen. Die Rampe ist keine Grenze . . . Wir stellen nichts dar. Wir stellen nichts vor. Wir tragen keine Decknamen. . . . Wir sind wir.[13]

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[12] Barthes, "Literatur und Bedeutung," op. cit., p. 108.

[13] Handke, "Publikumsbeschimpfung," in Handke, Publikumsbeschimpfung und andere Sprechstücke (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), pp. 18-19. This collection of "Sprechstücke" will hereafter be referred to by the shortened title, Publikumsbeschimpfung.

This piece was initially performed in the "Experimenta" at Frankfurt's TAT (Theater am Turm) in 1966. With this "play" Handke challenges the traditional form of theater by allowing the spoken words to be the actors, rather than using dialogue merely to intensify the actors' acting. In fact, the "action", in the traditional sense, is almost reduced to zero: in Structuralist terms; a synchronic situation with the audience sitting, breathing, listening and watching spoken words being spoken on a time level coinciding exactly with their own.

Although it completely evaded his critics, Handke did succeed with Publikumsbeschimpfung in demonstrating how, according to Barthes, literature (in this case the theater) is a parasite of language, and it was not, in fact, written to while away aesthetically his own as well as the audience's time, as was suggested by a critic.[14] Rudolf Krämer-Badoni's comment, "Es wurde aufgeräumt, damit die Sprache Raum gewinne",[15] is an accurate summation of the event. Handke makes his intentions to "clean up" the theater quite clear when

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[14] Wolfgang Ignée, "Publikum Raus!" in Scharang, op. cit., p. 118.

[15] Rudolf Krämer-Badoni, "Die Sprache beim Wort genommen," in Scharang, p. 116.

he states in the Spiegel:

> Bevor man ein richtiges Stück über etwas, über England, meinetwegen, oder über Hitler schreibt, [muss man] ein Stück schreiben . . . über das Theater, darüber, wie das auf dem Theater funktioniert.[16]

In doing so, Handke essentially adopts Barthes' two operations of "Zerlegung" and "Arrangement" in that he disassembles the theater in order to rid it of all elements which would detract from the spoken words, which then receive the central position in his new "Arrangement". Hence: no props, no costumes, no acting, the words, as mentioned before, being the sole actors and thereby demonstrating that they alone are the fundament of the theater. The only action is that of the audience listening to and reacting to the words. In this manner, Handke focuses on the synchronic nature of Structuralist thought. As emphasised in many lines of the play, the time that passes on the stage is not a represented time, it is not different from that of the audience: "Wir stellen keine andere Zeit dar . . . Wir sprechen, während die Zeit vergeht."[17] The play begins when the first visitor arrives and is over

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[16] Horst-Dieter Ebert, "Unerschrocken naiv," op. cit., p. 187.

[17] Handke, Publikumsbeschimpfung, p. 27.

when the last guest leaves the theater. Nothing is represented and nothing is described.

Handke himself explains this arrangement: "Es kann in den Sprechstücken keine Handlung geben, weil jede Handlung auf der Bühne nur das Bild von einer anderen Handlung wäre."[18] The piece is an entity in itself and no external information is required for its complete comprehension. The piece is synchronic and must not be examined from the point of view of the evolution of theater, but from the aspect of its present function. Consequently, Handke has shown an alternative to the "Beschreibungsliteratur" which he heard at Princeton and has offered a possible solution to what he voiced as a major problem in literature in his essay of 1966 entitled "Die Literatur ist romantisch":

> Es gibt also in der Literatur kein natürliches Sprechen: . . . jedes natürliche Sprechen, das zugleich Handeln ist, muss, wenn es auch völlig unverändert in die Literatur übernommen wird, künstlich und formal werden: das natürliche Sprechen wird dann eben zur Form der Literatur.[19]

In order to prevent exactly this: that is, that his "Sprechstücke" become a "form" and hence diachronic, in other words, that they would evolve and become

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[18] Handke, "Bemerkung zu meinen Sprechstücken," in Publikumsbeschimpfung, p. 95.

[19] Handke, "Die Literatur ist romantisch," in Elfenbeinturm, p. 48.

subject to time or an historic process, he very soon stopped further productions of Publikumsbeschimpfung and he wrote no more "Sprechstücke". For Handke, the "Sprechstück" existed at the time of its creation, being a reality only then. It was a valid solution to some real problems which had become evident to him in the literature he had heard at Princeton. However, to consider the "Sprechstück" as a possible solution was also to exhaust the possibility of the "Sprechstück" as a solution. Handke explains why this is so:

> Eine Möglichkeit besteht für mich jeweils nur ein Mal. Die Nachahmung dieser Möglichkeit ist dann schon unmöglich . . . Ein Darstellungsmodell, beim ersten Mal auf die Wirklichkeit angewendet, kann realistisch sein, beim zweiten Mal schon ist es eine Manier, ist irreal. . . .
> . . . weithin wird missachtet, dass eine einmal gefundene Methode, Wirklichkeit zu zeigen, buchstäblich "mit der Zeit" ihre Wirkung verliert. Die einmal gewonnene Methode wird nicht jedesmal neu überdacht, sondern unbedacht übernommen.[20]

Hence Peter Handke thought about his program again, and he came up with a new "reality": Kaspar. Having managed in Publikumsbeschimpfung to focus the attention on language, on words, he approaches the roots of the Structuralist concept of "synchrony" in this play. The focal point of Kaspar is interactions: he concentrates

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[20] Handke, "Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms," in Elfenbeinturm, p. 20.

upon the interactions of a society and an individual, and on the implications of certain conventions for the ablity of an individual to express himself accurately and freely. This is not an entirely new approach, as was suggested by Günther Rühle, when he commented that Handke belonged to a young breed of authors who fancied making new reflections about language.[21] Saussure had already considered these problems in Geneva in 1910 when he wrote:

> Mais qu'est-ce que la langue? C'est à la fois un produit social de la faculté du langage et un ensemble de conventions nécessaires, adoptées par le corps social pour permettre l'exercice de cette faculté chez les individus. Pris dans son tout, le langage est multiforme et hétéroclite: à cheval sur plusiers domaines, à la fois physique, physiologique et psychique, il appartient encore au domaine individuel et au domain social.[22]

The interaction of these many-faceted social, physical and psychological phenomena obviously beam significant implications for an individual's language, and in order to study a system of signs, be it language or its "parasite" literature, or any semiotic system for that matter, one must bear this in mind and consequently consider a synchronic approach to one's investigation.

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[21] Günther Rühle, "Allerlei Absprünge," in Scharang, p. 111.

[22] Saussure, Cours, p. 25.

That is, one must examine the components of such a system not in terms of their value as a single component, but rather in terms of the value they receive or the functions they assume through another component. For example, a word has really no value until one considers the speaker, the context, and the social situation in which it was spoken. This is the manner in which Peter Handke carries out such an investigation in the play, Kaspar.

Handke shows Kaspar's theatrical "birth": he stumbles through a split in the curtain, which he was not even looking for, and utters a sound. This "sound" happens to be a sentence, but it is only a sentence because we, the theater-goer or the reader, recognise it as such. Since Kaspar is "born" on the stage, no misconceptions can be made about him: Kaspar is a "child" of the theater, and brings no background onto the stage with him. The event which the audience is about to witness will not be based on any previous event; it will be a process which could not take place anywhere else but on the stage--i.e., it is a theatrical event. Kaspar is about to undergo a process: he is going to learn something about himself and his surroundings by means of language. Since the distinguishing feature of Handke's theater remains that it is not theater, Kaspar cannot base his "learning process" upon

any foundation which he has brought in from behind the scenes. Handke allows no mistake to be made about this. In his instructions for the presentation of the play, he spells out to the letter just how synchronic his play is:

> Die Zuschauer sehen das Bühnenbild nicht als Bild eines woanders gelegenen Raumes, sondern als Bild von der Bühne. Das Bühnenbild stellt die Bühne dar . . .
> Die Gegenstände, . . . sind sofort als Requisiten erkennbar. . . . Sie haben keine Geschichte. Die Zuschauer können sich nicht vorstellen, dass, bevor sie eingetreten sind und die Bühne erblickt haben, auf der Bühne eine Geschichte vor sich gegangen ist. . . .
> Ebensowenig können sich die Zuschauer vorstellen, dass Gegenstände auf der Bühne die Gegenstände einer Geschichte sein werden, die vorgibt, irgendwo anders vor sich zu gehen als auf der Bühne: sie erkennen sofort, dass sie einem Vorgang zusehen werden, der nicht in irgendeiner Wirklichkeit, sondern auf der Bühne spielt. Sie werden keine Geschichte miterleben, sondern einen theatralischen Vorgang.[23]

This "theatralischer Vorgang", that is, this process which the audience will experience, is not an historical process--it is an interreactory process. Kaspar needs the "Einsager" to tell him the words with which he in turn will be able to label (organise) his surroundings and come to be aware of his own reactions. The situation is rather artificial, but just as Saussure remained open to the fact that "pure" synchronic study of

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[23] Handke, Kaspar (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), p. 8.

language, i.e., synchronic to the complete exclusion of diachrony, is artificial, so did Handke remain aware of the limits of his demonstration, stressing the point that Kaspar represented a "Möglichkeit"--a possibility.

Günther Schiwy, who has taken it upon himself to introduce the phenomenon of Structuralism into Germany, and who alone recognises Handke's work as being reflective of Structuralist thought, supports the view that Handke is seeking to demonstrate synchronic thought in Kaspar and that Handke does remain aware of the artificiality of the situation, just as Saussure once was aware of the artificiality of studying linguistics by completely ignoring its historical or evolutionary aspects. In his book entitled Neue Aspekte des Strukturalismus, Schiwy concludes a chapter entitled "Synchronie und Diachronie und keine Konsequenzen" with the following comment--a concise summation of Handke's intentions in Kaspar:

> Es geht nicht um Kaspar Hauser, sondern um "jemand," um einen zeitlosen, allgemeingültigen Vorgang. Die Wirklichkeit ist anders. In ihr ist dieser Vorgang nicht so rein feststellbar, er ist immer inkarniert in ein bestimmtes Subjekt und eine bestimmte Situation, die sich nicht einfach unter das Zeitlose und Allgemeine subsumieren lassen. Wenn ich den Vorgang dennoch rein darstellen will, muss ich eine künstliche Situation schaffen, einen zeitlosen, allgemeinen Raum, eine Bühne, muss ich wissen, dass ich Theater mache, dass ich die Geschichte, das Historische, künstlich

> stillege. Genau das hat Ferdinand de Saussure gefordert, als er die Unterscheidung Diachronie und Synchronie einführte und sich für seine Strukturale Sprachwissenschaft auf den synchronen, das heisst "zeitgleichen" Aspekt der Sprache konzentrieren wollte, in bewusster Vernachlässigung ihres diachronen, das heisst sich "durch die Zeit" erstreckenden Wandels.[24]

The "Einsager" demonstrate that Kaspar's sentence cannot bring anything in from the outside and neither can it make anything happen now; he can, however, become more aware of his immediate environment. "Du stösst auf etwas, wodurch der Satz unterbrochen wird, wodurch du aufmerksam werden kannst, dass du auf etwas gestossen bist."[25]

The words, in this case the words of Kaspar's sentence, as was the case in Publikumsbeschimpfung, again assume a central position in the theater. They are one of the "items" on the stage with which Kaspar must cope. He bumps into a chair and thereby "bumps" into his sentence. The collision with the chair brings the sentence to his attention, by means of the interruption. Kaspar is not actually aware that he has collided with an object, because he cannot name the object, he does not know "collision"; in fact, he is not even

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[24] Günther Schiwy, Neue Aspekte des Strukturalismus (München: DTV, 1973), p. 120. This work will hereafter be referred to by the shortened title, Neue Aspekte.

[25] Handke, Kaspar, p. 20.

aware of the "Ich".

The process which follows sees Kaspar being able to relate events and words. And this brings us to the next important aspect of Structuralist thought: the distinction that Saussure originally made between "langue", "langage" and "parole".

CHAPTER III

"LANGUE" AND "PAROLE": THE SOCIAL VERSUS THE INDIVIDUAL ASPECT OF LANGUAGE

Once he had established that language is an object with certain properties, Saussure proceeded, in his Cours de Linguistique Génerále,[1] to define even further his object language; to break it down (Zerlegung) and to assign even more specifically certain definitive characteristics to it.

Saussure saw in man the inherent ability to speak: an entirely physical aspect of language. However, in examining the use of this inherent ability, two further aspects became evident: the social and the individual aspects. Having made these distinctions, Saussure then referred to this inherent ability to speak as "faculté du langage"; to the social aspect as "langue"; and to the individual aspect as the "parole".

Most pertinent to Structuralist thought is the distinction between "langue" and "parole". Once again, we are dealing with the concept of interrelationships: language and culture being interdependent. Saussure's

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[1] Saussure, Cours, ed. cit.

reference to "langue" as an "ensemble de conventions nécessaires adoptées par le corps social pour permettre l'usage de la faculté du langage chez les individus" [2] implies that, although man is equipped with the inherent ability to speak, it is not this which determines whether or not he will become a social, that is, a communicative, being. The key to becoming a communicative and thereby a social being depends upon the conventions which have been adopted by a social body or within a social system and man's ability to assimilate and make use of these conventions. Roland Barthes, in referring to that point, says:

> Man does not exist prior to language, either as a species or as an individual. We never find a state where man is separated from language, which he then creates in order to "express" what is taking place within him: it is language which teaches the definition of man, not the reverse.[3]

The implication here is that, at some point, man becomes aware of this "language" and seeks to use it. To use it communicatively, however, he is forced to carry out Barthes' principle of "Zerlegung" and "Arrangement".

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[2] Saussure, Cours, p. 25.

[3] Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" in Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds., The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man, op. cit., p. 135.

Since man is not continually conscious of this social aspect, "langue", which constitutes the system of conventions of a certain social environment or culture, it is a passively assimilated system. The operation "Zerlegung" is carried out the moment the assimilation becomes conscious, and is followed by the operation of "Arrangement", in that certain elements will be taken from the system in order to "express" something. This "expression" or new arrangement constitutes a person's "parole".

The passively assimilated system is also referred to as the "code". This "code" is not merely a system of grammatical or lexical rules which are easily recognised in the "parole"; it goes beyond that. The "code" is that underlying system which is present in the "parole", but is not immediately obvious in it. Further, the "code" is the system underlying not only the act of "parole", but any communicative act. However, when one selects elements from this "code" in order to speak, words for example, the question still remains: in this individual act of "editing," does one manipulate the "code", or has one first been manipulated by the "code"; that is, exactly how individual is the individual act of "parole"? This immediately gives rise to the structuralist's question: "What is the status of words in society?" Rather than being something which

one is taught, they seem to have assumed the role of the teachers.

It is this aspect which Peter Handke, by means of literature, the "parasite" of language, seeks to show: the dominant position that words actually have in society. A starting point for this demonstration of Handke's was his play, Kaspar.

Kaspar has been referred to as everything from "ontologische Turnstunde",[4] to "das wichtigste Stück, das das deutsche Nachkriegstheater überhaupt hervorgebracht hat",[5] to "gross"[6] in sarcastic quotation marks. The reviews, for the most part, remained cool, seldom going beyond description of the nuances of the play, with some reserved comments such as, "Noch immer ist die Bühne vor allem Sprachraum",[7] and "Ein Lehrstück von der Sprache, vom Drama zwischen Mensch und Sprache."[8] The critic Heinz Ludwig Arnold, at the end

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[4] Martin Walser, "Über die neuste Stimmung im Westen," Kursbuch, 20 (1970), p. 31.

[5] Marianne Kesting, Panorama des zeitgenössischen Theaters, 58 literarische Portraits (München: Piper, 1969), p. 364. Cited from Christa Dixon, "Peter Handkes Kaspar, Ein Modellfall," German Quarterly, 1 (1973), p. 31.

[6] Ernst Wendt, "Der Behringer der Beat-Generation," in Scharang, p. 130.

[7] Peter Iden, "Triumpf und Pleite der Wörter," in Scharang, p. 134.

[8] Günther Rühle, "Der Jasager und die Einsager," in Scharang, p. 134.

of a review, rhetorically asks: " . . . bedeutet nun Handkes Kaspar mehr als er ist? . . . Macht nicht schon die demonstrierende Beschreibung seiner sprachlichen und dramaturgischen Zusammenhänge deutlich, dass er . . . jene These belegt, . . . dass nämlich Sprache Gewalt ausübe über Personen? Ich glaube schon."[9] In Kaspar, we are not looking at an example of force (Gewalt): the point of discussion is manipulation--somewhat more subtle than force. It is the manipulation between the social and the individual aspect of language--the "langue" and the "parole".

First, it must be remembered that Kaspar is a synchronic, theatrical event, and that Kaspar, the figure which stumbles onto the stage, does not exist prior to his entry onto this stage. In fact, his being on the stage is just as accidental as the presence of the other objects on the stage, which are simply there, scattered about with no relation to one another. Kaspar makes no difference between himself and these objects until he says his sentence, which is: "Ich möcht ein solcher werden wie einmal ein andrer gewesen ist."[10]

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[9] Heinz-Ludwig Arnold, "Peter Handkes Kaspar, Versuch einer Beschreibung," Text und Kritik, 24a (1969), pp. 30-31.

[10] Handke, Kaspar, p. 14.

With this sentence, his only possession, he demonstrates his inherent ability to speak--his "faculté du langage". Kaspar, however, tries to apply his sentence to all of his surroundings, he tries to react to things with his sentence. He looks at his feet and says his sentence, he opens doors and says his sentence, he looks around himself and recites his sentence. The form of Kaspar's behavior resembles that of "parole", (he is talking), but it cannot be, since "parole" is achieved through editing a "langue" and "langue" is a social phenomenon. Thus Kaspar, not yet having been exposed to any social system, cannot have been subject to any "langue." Hence Handke's postulate: Kaspar indicates with his one sentence that he possesses a "faculté du langage", but this sentence cannot serve as "parole" because it has not been chosen from any given system of signs, that is, it has not been "edited" from a "langue" or derived from a "code". Kaspar can repeatedly react to his newly discovered environment with his sentence but nothing happens, because his sentence, according to the "code" of the system in which he presently finds himself, makes no sense. Handke proceeds then to show that, as Kaspar is "fed" the system by the "Einsager", he too becomes a part of it. As he is made familiar with the "langue", he learns the environment and can in turn distinguish himself from his surroundings. To a

certain extent, Kaspar can manipulate his surroundings: he can move the chairs, open and close doors and drawers, and he can feel pain--all because he has learned the words for these manipulations. In fact, when Kaspar finally abandons his sentence completely and assimilates more and more of the "langue" presented to him by the "Einsager", he finds himself able to create relationships among the objects on the stage: he can put order into his surroundings and he can categorize his behavior. At first, Kaspar is delighted with his new ability:

> Seit ich sprechen kann, kann ich alles in Ordnung bringen . . . Seit ich sprechen kann, kann ich ordnungsgemäss aufstehen; aber das Fallen tut erst weh, seit ich sprechen kann, aber das Wehtun beim Fallen ist halb so schlimm, seit ich weiss, dass ich über das Wehtun sprechen kann; aber das Fallen ist doppelt so schlimm, seit ich weiss, dass man über mein Fallen sprechen kann; aber das Fallen tut überhaupt nicht mehr weh, seit ich weiss, dass ich weiss, dass ich das Wehtun vergessen kann. [11]

With this in mind, let us turn once again to Saussure's definition of language in Cours de Linguistique Générale. After having established that language has two distinct aspects, a social and an individual one, he goes on to say that through the acquisition of the social aspect, "langue", order is put into an otherwise chaotic organism:

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[11] Handke, Kaspar, p. 30.

> La langue, au contraire, est un tout en soi et un principe de classification. Dès que nous lui donnons la première place parmi les faits de langage, nous introduisons un ordre naturel dans un ensemble qui ne se prête à aucune autre classification.[12]

However, even though the order exists, as long as it is assimilated passively, as is the case with Kaspar, it cannot facilitate the individual act of "parole". With the "langue" that Kaspar assimilates by means of the "Einsager", he can become aware of himself and of his surroundings, but by so doing he only becomes a part of the system, with no individual characteristic. This is ingeniously shown by Handke, in that he has Kaspar surrounded by other Kaspars, who are replicas of himself, and Kaspar gradually loses control of the "order" he had once established. Kaspar loses control when the system becomes too large, and he has not the ability necessary to manipulate the system; that is, to choose the elements from the "code" and arrange them in such a fashion that they constitute a "parole". Kaspar cannot edit the material that he gets "eingesagt". Consequently he cannot come to develop a "parole" which would make him a communicative being, and not just "zufällig ich".

Kaspar had the potential to speak (faculté du langage); he then acquired a "langue", but he could not

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[12] Saussure, Cours, p. 25.

manipulate it, he could not use it efficiently--he could not "express" himself. Having learned the conventions, but not to manipulate them externally, he can only order his surroundings for himself internally by attaching a name to everything. But to refer back to the original complaint of Saussure and much later that of Handke, too, Kaspar's use of language does not go beyond simple "labeling", that is, " . . . la conception superficielle du grand public: il ne voit dans la langue qu'une nomenclature."[13]

Kaspar cannot reach individuality then, because at no point does he actually consciously become aware of the system of conventions in which he finds himself. Since the point of awareness is never reached, the operation of "Zerlegung" is never carried out and of course the "Arrangement", the individual arrangement of certain elements, the "parole", is completely impeded. Kaspar is then integrated into the system and he literally "goes under": he has no resistance, i.e., individuality. "Ich leiste keinen nennenswerten Widerstand"[14] are among his last words.

Again, Handke allows for no misconceptions about the nature of his play. The first words one reads

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[13] Saussure, Cours, p. 34.

[14] Handke, Kaspar, p. 101.

(or the audience hears recited to them as they shuffle to their seats) are: "Das Stück Kaspar zeigt nicht, wie es WIRKLICH war mit Kaspar Hauser. Es zeigt, was MÖGLICH ist mit jemandem."[15]

Handke does not, however, hesitate to consider the concepts of "langue" and "parole" from the point of view of yet another possibility: that of an individual who realises the dominant position of "langue" over himself and who seeks to change the situation. This is the case in Handke's novel, Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied.[16]

The narrator and central figure of this novel begins his experience approximately where Kaspar was just before the "system" overpowered him. However, quite distinct from Kaspar, he is aware that the conventions, the social aspect of language, exist and have always existed beyond his awareness. He realises that he has assimilated a "langue" all too passively and has consequently remained non-communicative. He cannot "edit": he cannot choose from the "code" elements for his individual purposes.

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[15] Handke, Kaspar, p. 7.

[16] Handke, Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972). This novel will hereafter be referred to by the shortened title, Der kurze Brief.

The operation of "Zerlegung" is inherent in this realisation: that is to say, an initial step in the operation of "Zerlegung". The problem with which the narrator is then confronted is as follows: he wishes to be able to decipher the "code" of the system in which he presently finds himself lost. This constitutes the operation of "Zerlegung"--he will seek to discover the rules according to which this system functions. Having done this, he may then edit the useful and the non-useful elements from the system in order to become communicative, i.e., to come to possess a "parole". This coming to a "parole" constitutes the operation of "Arrangement".

The central figure's first error, which is Handke's demonstration of what does NOT constitute a "langue", is that he assumes that by simply changing his geographic and linguistic environment, he will change his relationship to the system from dominated to dominant. Hence the narrator travels from Austria to the USA and waits to feel "changed." "Jetzt bin ich den zweiten Tag in Amerika," he says, "Ob ich mich schon verändert habe?"[17] However, his "langue" cannot be changed like his Austrian money. "Langue" is above all a system of conventions--a value system--and even when confronted with entirely new signs, one tends to associate old,

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[17] Handke, Der kurze Brief, pp. 17-18.

embedded values, either consciously or unconsciously, with the new signs. In the words of Günther Schiwy: "Die Dingwelt ist leicht geändert, die Welt der Bedeutungen ist konservativ."[18] Because the narrator has in fact passively registered a system of signs or conventions in the course of his life, the "change" he is seeking to undergo lies not in the acquisition of an entirely new system, he needs only to become aware of his already acquired "langue". Thereby he will be capable of editing, or "Arrangement"--finding the combinations in the system which are necessary for him to be able to express himself. The change he is seeking is an internal process then, rather than an external change of location. This situation into which Handke places the central figure is a practical example of Saussure's explanation of the functions of "langue" and "parole" and their differences:

> En séparant la langue de la parole, on sépare du même coup: 1. ce qui est social de ce qui est individuel; 2. ce qui est essentiel de ce qui est accessoire et plus ou moins accidental.
>
> La langue n'est pas une fonction du sujet parlant, elle ne suppose jamais de préméditation, et la réflexion n'y intervient que pour l'activité de classement dont il sera question.
>
> La parole est au contraire un acte individuel de volonté et d'intelligence, dans lequel il convient de distinguer:

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[18] Günther Schiwy, Strukturalismus und Zeichensysteme (München: Beck, 1973), p. 30.

1. les combinaisons par lesquelles le sujet parlant utilise le code de la langue en vue d'exprimer sa pensée personnelle;
2. le mécanisme psycho-physique qui lui permet d'extérioriser ces combinaisons.[19]

The "psycho-physical" mechanism is not the problem of the central figure in Der kurze Brief--he must learn to find the combinations.

He then proceeds to order and categorize his experiences in the USA and realises that to assimilate anything consciously it is necessary to "statt nur hin zu schauen und es als 'AHA!' zu erleben, Vorgänge auch zu Ende zu betrachten."[20] This constituted the act of active assimilation. Eventually, he realises that the complete change he anticipated was neither necessary, nor was it humanly possible:

> . . . als mir einfiel, wie notwendig aufgelöst und leer, ohne eigene Lebensform, ich mich in der anderen Welt bewegen würde; ich empfand heftig ein allgemeines paradiesisches Lebensgefühl, ohne Verkrampfung und Angst, in dem ich selber . . . nicht mehr vorkam, und es grauste mir so sehr vor dieser leeren Welt. . . .
> In diesem Augenblick verlor ich für immer die Sehnsucht, mich loszusein. . . .
> Ich wusste, dass ich mich von all diesen Beschränktheiten nie mehr loswünschen würde, und dass es von jetzt an nur darauf ankam, für sie alle eine Anordnung und eine Lebensart zu finden, die mir gerecht wäre und in der auch andere Leute mir gerecht werden konnten.[21]

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[19] Saussure, Cours, pp. 30-31.

[20] Handke, Der kurze Brief, p. 117.

[21] ibid., pp. 101-102.

The "happy end" of the story lies in the fact that the narrator does become aware of, and tolerant towards, his passively assimilated system, and in doing so he becomes aware of, and tolerant towards, something else: the fact that the combinations chosen to form a "parole" may vary slightly from individual to individual and that this variation is responsible for the quality of individuality, even though everyone has more or less the same "parole".

Kaspar could not separate (edit) the signs that were necessary for self-expression from all those offered to him by the "Einsager". Such was the case with the central figure in Der kurze Brief: at the onset of his journey, he left himself open to every flashing neon sign, to every movement, to every pimple on every bartender's face. He was not capable of editing, since he had absorbed signs and signals in such a passive manner for such a long time. The result of this is the utter chaos in his conception of the "langue"; i.e., in his social or communicative self. He then puts order into the chaos by becoming selective; by choosing the "signs" which are of consequence to him and which will make up a "parole" which will be his own. Günther Schiwy sums up the narrator's "AHA!"-experience and the conclusion he reaches with the following words:

> Ein System erstreckt sich nicht auf alle möglichen Gegenstände, sondern wählt aus, verwirft andere, sieht und hört selektiv: das Interesse nimmt gewisse Objekte erst gar nicht wahr, alle, die überflüssig sind oder stören könnten. . . .
> Welt ist zuerst--und zuletzt--nichts anderes als die überschaubare und deutbare Anordnung von Zeichen, die einen etwas angehen. . . .[22]

This leaves us then, to consider the "Zeichen": those very specific components of communication, the choosing of and the receiving of signs among communicative persons--Saussure's concepts of "signifiant" and "signifié".

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[22] Schiwy, Strukturalismus und Zeichensysteme, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

CHAPTER IV

"SIGNIFIANT" AND "SIGNIFIÉ": INTENDED VERSUS ACHIEVED EXPRESSION

Up to this point, the concern has been with a system of signs and with the nature and characteristics of this system. Bearing in mind that all semiological systems (systems of signs) attain their value as a system through the communicative value of their interacting components, it is now necessary to investigate these components. Again, it was Saussure who pointed out that in a communicative system, the choice of the communicative sign is arbitrary: "Le signe linguistique est arbitraire,"[1] and that the significance of any sign in any situation is not an intrinsic significance, but rather dependent upon the presiding social conventions--i.e., the presiding "langue". Saussure's own words were:

> En effet tout moyen d'expression reçu dans une société repose en principe sur une habitude collective, ce qui revient au même, sur la convention. Les signes de politesse . . . par exemple, n'en sont pas moins fixé par une règle; c'est cette règle qui oblige à les employer, non leur valeur intrinsèque.[2]

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[1] Saussure, Cours, p. 100.

[2] ibid., p. 101.

Further, it is because of this arbitrariness of signs together with the fact that within a society the tendency is to develop habits in choosing signs, that a linguistic system is developed within that society:

> A son tour, l'arbitraire du signe nous fait mieux comprendre pourquoi le fait social peut seul créer un système linguistique.[3]

An individual's "parole", then, is chosen from the presiding linguistic system, and must be further analysed in terms of its communicability. Each "signe" chosen by an individual for the purpose of self-expression has a double character: it has a certain value as an emitted signal and a certain value as a received signal. The communicative value, that is, the achieved expression, lies in the correspondance of the two value systems (the "langue") of the emitter and of the receiver. Saussure referred to these two characteristics of a sign as the "signifiant" and the "signifié"; the former being the "image acoustique . . . étant de nature auditive;"[4] and the latter the "concept".[5] He concludes by summarizing:

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[3] Saussure, Cours, p. 157.

[4] ibid., pp. 99 ff.

[5] ibid.

> Nous appelons signe la combinaison du concept et de l'image acoustique.
>
> Nous proposons de conserver le mot signe pour désigner le total, et de remplacer concept et image acoustique respectivement par signifié et signifiant.[6]

In his efforts to uncover the literary implications of Structuralist thought, Peter Handke demonstrated the value of synchronic investigation of a system (Publikumsbeschimpfung) and the importance of making the distinction between "langue" and "parole" (Kaspar). However, in the final analysis, the most important distinction having the most significant implication for literature and literary criticism is that of distinguishing the "signifiant" from the "signifié". Handke's collection of "poetry", Die Innenwelt der Aussenwelt der Innenwelt,[7] constitutes one of his earliest efforts to demonstrate the significance of this distinction. In this collection, he is not, as Reinhold Grimm put it, demonstrating "menschliche und politische Leidenschaft mit allen Techniken experimenteller Lyrik."[8] The purpose of this collection is, as was the purpose in Publikumsbeschimpfung and Kaspar, to evoke awareness. Handke is sending out

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[6] Saussure, Cours, p. 99.

[7] Handke, Die Innenwelt der Aussenwelt der Innenwelt (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969). This collection of "poetry" will hereafter be referred to by the shortened title, Innenwelt.

[8] Reinhold Grimm, "Der Sammelband von Handke," in Scharang, p. 57.

signals to be taken at face value. Again, Handke makes his intentions quite clear:

> Ich habe keine Themen, über die ich schreiben möchte, ich habe nur ein Thema: über mich selbst klar, klarer zu werden, mich kennenzulernen oder nicht kennenzulernen, zu lernen, was ich falsch mache, was falsch denke, was ich unbedacht denke, was ich unbedacht spreche, was ich automatisch spreche, was auch andere unbedacht tun, denken, sprechen: aufmerksam zu werden und aufmerksam zu machen: sensibler, empfindlicher, genauer zu machen und zu werden, damit ich und andere auch genauer und sensibler existieren können, damit ich mich mit anderen besser verständigen und mit ihnen besser umgehen kann.[9]

The possibility which Handke is using this time to evoke this awareness is a collection of visually arranged "signifiants", which make up a "parole" that is so commonplace that one would think that communication is immediately established. However, this is not the case. The fact that his "signifiants" are so common, renders them almost non-communicative, because upon seeking to assign a value to them, one realises that the number of associative possibilites is endless. Hence the achieved expression, i.e., the "signifié", conceptualized by the reader, may or may not have anything to do with Handke's intended expression, with his "signifiants", Once again, the problem is one of social conventions, of associations derived from value systems.

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[9] Handke, "Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms," in Elfenbeinturm, p. 20.

Thinking of literature in the context of an "intended expression", let us consider briefly a comment from Roland Barthes' essay, "Schriftsteller und Schreiber":

> Im Grunde ist die Literatur immer irrealistisch, aber gerade ihr Irrealismus ermöglicht ihr oft, der Welt die richtigen Fragen zu stellen--ohne dass allerdings diese Fragen jemals direkt sein können.[10]

In his Innenwelt collection, Handke is in fact seeking to pose just these questions in the hope that when one realises that he is faced with the choice of a number of possible associations with any one signal, it follows that one questions the value of the sign and considers more carefully the system of associations from which one must choose. In this manner, any static, passive preconceptions are called in question and thereby destroyed; one is free to reevaluate the conceptions and hence is forced to exist more actively and dynamically within the system in which one functions. In the essay "Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms" Handke states:

> Ich erwarte von der Literatur ein Zerbrechen aller endgültig scheinenden Weltbilder. Und weil ich erkannt habe, dass ich selber mich durch Literatur ändern konnte, dass ich durch die Literatur erst bewusster leben konnte,

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[10] Roland Barthes, in Literatur, op. cit., p. 47

> bin ich auch überzeugt, durch meine Literatur andere ändern zu können.[11]

And this is precisely the program which he follows in the Innenwelt collection. In order to evoke any sort of change, one must first create an awareness of the situation at hand, and Handke makes his readers aware by simply presenting things to be considered--by presenting controversial "signifiants".

For example, he includes the Japanese Hitparade dated May 25, 1968.[12] To whom could this possibly be of any consequence at all, one asks, or what is its function in this collection, assuming that it has one at all? Let us conceptualize this "sign" from the reference point of the date then: May 25, 1968. This was the night of the most savage fighting during the French crisis of May/June, 1968: a revolt which began with some anti-Vietnam War gestures (bombs in the windows of the Bank of America in Paris, etc), spread among students to a protest against the French educational system and eventually fired up the workers to strike and occupy as well. There were several deaths, Pompidou feared the outbreak of a civil war, 800 people were taken into custody and 1500 more wounded. The courtyard

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[11] Handke, in Elfenbeinturm, p. 26.

[12] Handke, in Innenwelt, pp. 78-80.

of the Sorbonne was turned into a field hospital. It is quoted as having been "the worst night of civil disturbances Paris had seen since the late thirties."[13] This "Hitparade" is then followed by a chaotic 4-page collage of newspaper clippings, concluding with the largest, most prominent word and an exclamation point: "TOT!"[14] Again, these four pages have no function unless one can assign a value to them, which must be done by means of association. In view of the preceding "Hitparade", one could consider then, that at the end of the revolts in 1968, the students marched through the streets of Paris proclaiming that Structuralism (which had been in ideological conflict with Marxism recently), was "dead".[15]

What happens in the Innenwelt collection is only the beginning of the communication process: the emission of the "signifiants". The rest of the process--assigning a value and hence registering a "signifié"--is to be taken up by the reader. Handke is sending out

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[13] Patrick Seale and Maureen McConnville, The French Revolution (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 172.

[14] Handke, Innenwelt, p. 86.

[15] It is interesting to note that just as Structuralism was gaining popularity in French intellectual circles, the events of May/June 1968 seemed to put a damper on the entire movement. See: Günther Schiwy, "Strukturalismus und die Mai-Revolution," in Schiwy, Neue Aspekte, op. cit., pp. 62 ff.

signals, not making comments, which would be, according to Roland Barthes, impossible anyway because it would involve operating in two systems at once:

> Es ist lächerlich . . . von einem Schriftsteller zu verlangen, dass er sein Werk engagiere. Ein Schriftsteller, der sich engagiert, erhebt den Anspruch, mit zwei Strukturen gleichzeitig spielen zu können, und das geht nicht ohne Betrug, nicht ohne das raffinierte Drehkreuz, mit dessen Hilfe Maître Jacques bald Koch, bald Kutscher wird, niemals aber beides zur gleichen Zeit sein kann.[16]

Again, Handke is in accordance with his Structuralist father, and he concludes his essay "Die Literatur ist romantisch" with the following comment:

> Eine engagierte Literatur gibt es nicht. Der Begriff ist ein Widerspruch in sich. Es gibt engagierte Menschen, aber keine engagierten Schriftsteller. Der Begriff "Engagement" ist politisch. Er ist höchstens anzuwenden auf politische Schriftsteller, die aber keine Schriftsteller in dem Sinn sind, wie er uns hier interessiert, sondern Politiker, die schreiben, was sie <u>sagen</u> wollen.[17]

It is obviously not in Handke's interest to make comments--it is not a political, commentary system in which he is operating. Handke's interest lies in demonstrating how comments are made, in other words, how the systems of an emitter and of a receiver of a sign or

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[16] Barthes, <u>Literatur</u>, p. 48.

[17] Handke, <u>Elfenbeinturm</u>, p. 43.

any combination of signs must be more or less coordinated in order that the communication about something can be established.

Handke considers this problem of establishing communication by means of coordinating "signifiants" and "signifiés" further in another of his theatrical works, Der Ritt über den Bodensee.[18] This is another play where "nothing happens"; the five main actors attempt throughout the entire play to coordinate their systems. That is: they send out "signifiants" and wait for a reaction, this reaction then indicating to the sender how his original sign has been conceptualized. Hence it is determined whether or not the achieved expression has anything to do with the sender's intended expression. The main problem which they encounter is that of association: the words evoke such a variety of conceptions, that the characters find themselves continually testing their "signifiants" in terms of how they have been received, and correcting any misconceptions which the receiver may have formed. For example, George and Jannings in determining the value of a set of rings:

> Jannings: "Ich habe noch nie von Ringen geträumt."
> George: "Weil Sie nie welche besassen."

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[18] Peter Handke, Der Ritt über den Bodensee (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972). Hereafter this play will be referred as Der Ritt.

Pause.
Jannings: "Im Gegenteil: weil ich welche besass."
Pause.
Jannings: "Und sie reizen mich auch nie zum Vergleichen."
George: "Weil sie Ihnen nicht genügten."
Pause.
Jannings: "Im Gegenteil: weil sie mir genügten."
Pause.
George: "So wie es--"
Jannings: " Schon wieder 'so--wie'?"
George: "Warten Sie ab!"
Er setzt noch einmal an:
"So wie es geborene Versager, geborene Störenfriede und geborene Verbrecher gibt--"
Jannings: "Wer sagt, dass es sie gibt?"
George: "Ich!"
Jannings: "Das beweist nichts."[19]

George must then go through two pages of dialectics to prove that just as there are "geborene Versager, geborene Störenfriede und geborene Verbrecher," there are also "geborene Besitzer". Jannings makes this very difficult for George, because George must first prove that everything of which Jannings has heard, i.e., knows the expression for, exists. He must prove this by giving Jannings numerous examples of things existent and non-existent. He can then convince Jannings that a "geborener Besitzer" exists logically because the others exist (Störenfriede, Verbrecher, Versager), and that these must exist because Jannings knows the words for them.

Handke does not necessarily mean that such a

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[19] Handke, Der Ritt, op. cit., p. 22.

meticulous, step-by-step analysis of expressions and associations should be undertaken in every communication, but the analysis does serve to show how our "langue" has become so passively assimilated, and that our conceptual elements of signs, our "signifiés", are formed in such an unreflected manner that the result can be communication on an auditory level only, but not on a more profound associative level. Observe how Henny Porten and Elisabeth Bergner, in the same play, sort out their problems of association:

> Henny Porten: "Jemand schaut sich öfter um, während er geht: hat er ein schlechtes Gewissen?"
> Elisabeth Bergner: "Nein, er schaut sich nur einfach öfter um!"
> Henny Porten: "Jemand sitzt mit gesenktem Kopf da: er ist traurig?"
> Elisabeth Bergner nimmt eine Mannequinpose für ihre Antwort ein: "Nein, er sitzt einfach nur mit gesenktem Kopf da!"
> Henny Porten: "Jemand zuckt zusammen: schuldbewusst?"
> Elisabeth Bergner antwortet mit einer anderen Mannequinpose: "Nein, er zuckt nur einfach zusammen!"[20]

It is interesting to note that she must assume an artificial pose to give such natural answers, because the natural answers have, in the course of her passively acquired "langue", taken second place to the artificial associations in Henny Porten's questions.

Gradually, the systems of the five main actors

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[20] Handke, Der Ritt, p. 48.

become more and more coordinated and they finally agree that a drawer which refuses to open does not do so simply because it is stuck. In this agreement they feel "freed", but Handke does not let them continue without the occasional little reminder of what it is that they are now "freed" from, and of how easy it is still to rely upon the passively assimilated system in order to realise a "signifié":

> Henny Porten zeigt Stroheim ihren nackten Arm:
> "Sehen Sie, ich habe eine Gänsehaut!"
> Erich von Stroheim: "Sind Sie--Ist Ihnen--"
> Er stockt rechtzeitig: "Sie haben eben eine Gänsehaut, nicht wahr?"
> Er lacht.
> Alle lachen, wie über eine böse Erinnerung.[21]

It is this same sort of behavior which the central figure in Der kurze Brief overcomes, however without the help of a group: he overcomes his "bad memory" alone. Handke uses this novel as a vehicle to expose other semiological systems, and he considers not only language, but also our entire physical and social environment as a system of signs subject to our evaluation of them in terms of "signifiants" and "signifiés". Road signs, neon signs, street signs, architecture, landscapes all combine in Der kurze Brief to make up the complex system in which the narrator is lost at the beginning

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[21] Handke, Der Ritt, p. 54.

of the novel and in which he finds his rightful place by the end.

One significant figure in Der kurze Brief is the child, Benedictine, usually referred to simply as "das Kind". Benedictine functions naturally in the same manner that the five main actors in Der Ritt functioned at the end of their coordination process: she attaches no associations, false or otherwise, to the signs and signals around her. She accepts everything at face value, on an individual basis. The narrator comments at one point:

> Es war eigenartig, dass Benedictine . . . die künstlichen Zeichen und Gegenstände der Zivilisation schon als Natur erlebte. Sie fragte viel eher nach Fernsehantennen, Zebrastreifen und Polizeisirenen als nach Wäldern und Gräsern und schien in der Umgebung von Signalen, Leuchtschriften und Ampeln lebhafter und zugleich doch ruhiger zu werden. So nahm sie es als naturgegeben, dass es Buchstaben und Zahlen gab, und betrachtete sie als selbstverständliche Dinge, ohne sie erst als Zeichen entziffern zu müssen.[22]

The child is remarkably like Kaspar--constantly demanding to know the words for things, and if one of her elders (her "Einsager") should accidentally refer to something by a second or different word than the first reference she had registered, then the thing ceased to exist. Benedictine categorizes and orders her

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[22] Handke, Der kurze Brief, p. 117.

experiences according to the signs which she learns for them, and new signs for which she has no experiences yet frighten her and thereby serve to manipulate her:

> . . . erst wenn man ein ihm neues Wort sprach, wurde es aufmerksam. Einmal wurde es am Abend kalt, aber ich konnte das Kind nicht dazu bringen, sich eine Jacke anziehen zu lassen: erst als ich sagte, es würde sonst eine Gänsehaut bekommen, horchte es auf und liess sich plötzlich ruhig anziehen.[23]

Because children react more naturally to situations than do adults, Handke can demonstrate basic and natural weaknesses common to all humans in the process of communication by means of his child. Once a "signifié" is passively associated with a "signifiant", it is difficult to consider an alternative, much less a replacement. Günther Schiwy sums up this problem with the following comment:

> Wir leben davon, dass die Gegenstände, die Vorgänge und vor allem wir selbst eine Identität haben, mit der man rechnen kann. Der Name, der wiederholte und sich gleichbleibende Name, ist das primitive Zeichen dafür, auf das wir ungern verzichten.[24]

Benedictine, too, became confused and insecure when her mother called her different names, something which occurred quite frequently.

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[23] Handke, Der kurze Brief, p. 117.

[24] Schiwy, Strukturalismus und Zeichensysteme, op. cit., p. 34.

In Handke's fight against making dangerous and hasty associations, he sets some very clever traps--in fact, he literally dares the reader to make passive associations. For example, when he speaks of Judith, his wife, as having no sense of direction or time, he intentionally falls into the trap himself as he bases this assumption solely upon the fact that her sense of time and direction is different from his: "Immer wenn man ihr die Zeit nannte, erschrak sie; während ich dagegen fast jede Stunde zum Telephon ging, um die Zeitansage zu hören. Sie fuhr jedesmal auf: 'Oh, schon so spät!' Nie sagte sie: 'Ah, noch so früh!'"[25] Similarly, the "signifié" in terms of which he reacts to her sense of direction is an equally absurd value judgemant--again he finds it "wrong":

> Wenn du zu einem Haus hinüber gehst, sagst du, dass du hinunter gehst; wenn wir schon lang vors Haus getreten sind, steht das Auto immer noch draussen; und wenn du in eine Stadt hinunterfährst, fährst du hinauf in die Stadt, nur weil die Strasse nach Norden fährt.[26]

At this stage, the narrator has not yet come to terms with the consideration that his "hinüber" is not more correct than Judith's "hinunter"; the two concepts have been chosen from the same "langue"--they are

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[25] Handke, Der kurze Brief, p. 21.

[26] ibid.

only slightly different concepts ("signifiés") for the same "signifiant".

Another trap which Handke sets and then neatly dodges is found in some of the pictures he paints for the reader, which are all too tempting for our associative powers. For example, a student whom he describes just after he has burped up more of the Coca-Cola he is continually drinking:

> Ein Student mit kurzen Haaren, pausbäckig, in Bermudahosen, mit dicken Schenkeln, in Turnschuhen, kam mir draussen entgegen, und ich blickte ihn entsetzt an, fassungslos bei dem Gedanken, dass jemals jemand es trotzdem wagen könnte, etwas Allgemeines über diese einzelne Figur zu sagen, dass jemand ihn typisieren . . . würde.[27]

Handke immediately deprives us of any temptation to generalize about this "all-American boy", in that he gives the student an individual characteristic--he <u>speaks</u> to him, and the student answers. Likewise, it is easy to make some sort of passively acquired association with the blonde with the black hair roots at the snackbar counter next to the American flag.[28] But again, Handke destroys the possibility of seeing these figures as anything else but as what they are with his

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[27] Handke, <u>Der kurze Brief</u>, p. 22.

[28] ibid.

curt "Und? Nichts weiter."[29]

In Der kurze Brief Handke well illustrates that the significance of this arbitrary associative relationship between "signifiants" and "signifiés" is that it makes signs and systems of signs unstable. It is important to remain aware of this quality of instability, especially in literary criticism. Literature is a system of signs among many others which affect a society. This implies that there is a message or a "signifiant" to be had from a literary "arrangement". However, the essence of literature lies not in this message, but in the system with which the message is communicated. Roland Barthes sees the problem of the critic as follows:

> . . . Literatur ist ein System von Zeichen: ihr Wesen liegt nicht in ihrer Botschaft, sondern in diesem System. Gerade deshalb ist es nicht die Aufgabe des Kritikers, die Botschaft des Werkes zu rekonstruieren, sondern nur ihr System, so wie der Linguist nicht die Bedeutung eines Satzes zu entschlüsseln hat, sondern die formale Struktur herausarbeiten muss, die die Übermittlung dieser Bedeutung möglich macht.[30]

For the critic then, it is not sufficient to consider a text in terms of the message he receives, which is

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[29] Handke, Der kurze Brief, p. 22.

[30] Barthes, "Was ist Kritik?" in Literatur, op. cit., p. 68.

entirely dependent on his own acquired value system. He must "discover" the system and thereby the author's intended expression; he must consider his "signifiants" in terms of this system. This indicates that the operation of "Zerlegung" and "Arrangement" must be undertaken before the associative "signifié"--the achieved expression--can be arrived at.

Just as the narrator, at the end of Der kurze Brief, realises that systems which differ from his own are not necessarily "wrong", so must the critic remain tolerant of systems with which he is not familiar. He must consider other possibilities and hence discover in a literary text the "system" in which the emitter of the signals is operating.

FINAL REMARKS

Peter Handke admittedly greatly appreciates any publicity allotted to him. He wrote an open letter of thanks to the Spiegel for focusing so much attention on his speech at Princeton, admitting that he had long wished to be cited in their journal and that seeing reporter Kuby making notes as he spoke at Princeton spurred him on all the more in his oratory.[1] Despite this and other public remarks of this nature, Peter Handke can no longer be passed over as lightly as he once was, for example as "tant de bruit pour une omelette."[2]

When he launched his attack on the literature presented at Princeton, he made the valid point that literature was losing itself in a sea of words over which it was losing control: that it was evolving into a chaotic, prestige-seeking activity which resulted in "style". He further pointed out that the critics had no defence either for or against this stalemate situation. Handke then proceeded to demonstrate that there is a solution to this crisis by producing works in which he eliminated stifling stylistic elements and concentrated on methodically "making" literature. He has

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[1] Handke, letter to the Spiegel, May 23 (1966), pp. 11-12.

[2] Fritz Raddatz, in Lettau, Die Gruppe 47, op. cit., p. 245.

backed his practical examples with essays expanding upon his theories, and, although he does not actually admit it at the time, the basic aspects of Structuralist thought in his theories cannot be overlooked, especially when he explains his work as pointedly as he does. For example, his own commentary to his novel Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter:[3]

> Das Prinzip war, zu zeigen, wie sich jemandem die Gegenstände, die er wahrnimmt, infolge eines Ereignisses (eines Mordes) immer mehr versprachlichen und, indem die Bilder versprachlicht werden, auch zu Geboten und Verboten werden. . . . . . der Fortgang der Geschichte richtet sich nicht danach, was im 2. Satz geschehen könnte, sondern was für ein Satz der 2. Satz nach dem 1. sein müsste; jetzt muss etwa ein Folge-Satz kommen, und nach diesem ein Relativ-Satz, nach diesem notwendig ein Final-Satz. Danach ergibt sich die Geschichte, ohne dass man dieses Prinzip freilich immer beim Lesen eingebläut kriegt, man merkt es wohl, merkt wie's gemacht wird, folgt aber doch immer der Erzählung.[4]

The fact that he operates within such a rigorously planned and well disciplined method has often been overlooked, but close scrutiny of his numerous works will reveal that he has never abandoned his investigation of language, communication, interrelationships and

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[3] Peter Handke, Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).

[4] Peter Handke, commentary to Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter, in Text und Kritik, 24 (1969), pp. 3-4.

associations within semiological systems. Handke signals a danger with his work: the danger that should literature cease to be communicative, then it will cease to remain an integral component of our society. By demonstrating that literature is "made" of language, which, in accordance with Saussure, he assumes to be the system of signs within our society upon which all other systems are based, Handke forces the element of communicability back into literature.

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